

Is the Price Right?

Extension Activity

These classroom activities correspond to the **Don't Buy It** game *Is the Price Right?* at http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/buyingsmart/price_flash.html

Is the Price Right? introduces students to a variety of products and the reason for their retail price tags. After students play this game, consider the many reasons why retail prices are so much higher than the manufacturing costs of the items, such as marketing, packaging, shipment of goods and profit margins.

Objectives

- Recognize techniques used by advertisers to sell bottled water
- Increase awareness of consumer habits
- Differentiate between information and selling
- Become aware of what motivates them to buy certain products

Materials

- Several different types of bottled water and tap water
- Scoring sheets for blind taste tests

Procedure

These days, when people are thirsty, they often reach for a bottle of water instead of turning on the faucet. In 2003, people in the US spent about \$9 billion on bottled water. Why? Some consumers believe that bottled water is healthier than tap water. Others believe it tastes better.

But, some of these bottled waters actually come from a municipal water supply -- just like the water coming out of your faucet -- and not from a mountain stream. Consider two of the more popular bottled waters: Aquafina (produced by Pepsi) and Dasani (produced by Coke). Both of these brands are processed municipal water. Yet, we pay upwards of \$1.39 for these bottles rather than a few pennies for water from the tap.

So, does bottled water really taste better?

Conduct a blind taste test with your class to see if they can differentiate between several different water brands. Choose a variety of bottled waters, such as Aquafina, Dasani, Evian, Crystal Geyser, Crystal Springs or others. Be sure to include tap water from the school water fountain in your taste test.

Before the taste test, ask your class to consider the following questions:

- What are some of the reasons that people drink bottled water? (In addition to the reasons listed above, some tap water is not as safe due to the pipes. Others might drink bottled water out of convenience.)
- Is the price of bottled water worth it, compared to the price of tap water?
- How do you think companies choose the names for their water brands?

Let the taste testing begin!

Have the taste testers rate each water based on odor, flavor and aftertaste. Grade each area on a scale of zero to 10, with zero being the lowest rating and 10 the best. The highest possible score is 30 points.

Example of Scoring Sheet:

	Odor	Flavor	Aftertaste	Total
Water #1				
Water #2				
Water #3				
Water #4				
Water #5				

After the taste test, have the class consider the following questions.

- Which water was the most popular?
- Which water was the least popular choice?
- Were the results surprising?
- What is the cost associated with each water? Do you think the price is worth it?
- What are the environmental impacts of using bottled water instead of tap water?

Additional Activity

What is the cost of a logo?

Often a popular brand name has a much higher retail price than a similar item with a no-name brand.

Have your class determine the cost of a logo. Research several popular brand names advertised in teen magazines or on MTV. Choose one particular product that you will research, such as jeans or t-shirts. Have your class find the retail price information for the products with popular logos and compare those prices to the no-name or lesser-known brands.

What are the differences in prices? Is there a reason why a brand name might command a higher price (for example, it is better made or made in the US)?

Additional Resources

Lempert, Phil. "Is your bottled water coming from a faucet?" MSNBC Web site. Available from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5467759/>

Consumer Report's Zillions Web site at <http://www.zillions.org>

Alignments

McREL Writing Standard

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes. Level 2 (Grade 3-5)

BENCHMARK: Uses electronic media to gather information (e.g., databases, Internet, CD-ROM, television shows, cassette recordings, videos, pull-down menus, word searches)

McREL Viewing Standard

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media. Level 2 (Grade 3-5)

BENCHMARK: Understands basic elements of advertising in visual media (e.g., sales approaches and techniques aimed at children, appealing elements used in memorable commercials, possible reasons for the choice of specific visual images).